

Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

0064: Marshall University Oral History
Collection

Digitized Manuscript Collections

1998

Oral History Interview: Bill & Jean Morris

Bill Morris

Follow this and additional works at: https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history

Recommended Citation

Marshall University Special Collections, OH64-574, Huntington, WV.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Manuscript Collections at Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in 0064: Marshall University Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu.

RELEASE FORM

Deed of Gift to the Public Domain

I, Bill & Jean Morris, do hereby give to the MU Morrow Library (archives or organization) the tape recordings and transcripts of my interviews on 4/23/98.

I authorize the MU Morrow Library (archive or organization) to use the tapes and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

Kimberly B. Hultin
(Agent of Receiving Organization)

4/23/98

(Date)

Bill Morris
(Donor)
Jean Morris

Tape # 1

Subject: Life Histories

An oral interview with: Bill and Jean

Conducted by: Kimberly Hultin

Date of Interview: April 23, 1998

Transcriptionist: Kimberly Hultin

0574

BILL & JEAN MORRIS

**MR. & MRS. MORRIS DISCUSS AT LENGTH, THE HISTORY OF
MILTON, HAVING SPENT ALL OF THEIR LIFE IN MILTON, THE
COAL MINES OF SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA, WORLD WAR II.
THEY CONCLUDE THE INTERVIEW TALKING WORKING FOR
THE RAILROAD, AND FINALLY, THEIR PRIDE IN WEST VIRGINIA.**

This interview deals mainly with four primary topics in addition to the interesting life stories of two people. This couple sheds light on the history of Milton, West Virginia complete with interesting facts about the town and the Railroad system. They also share stories of "escaping" the coal mines of Southern West Virginia and stories of service life in the Army during World War II. Everything this couple shared with me on April 23, 1998 was interesting and worthwhile listening.

Interviewer: Okay, my name is Kim Hultin and I am sitting here with Bill and Jean. It is April the twenty-third of 1998 and it's about 1:15 [p.m.]. I need to ask you guys, before we get started, if you are aware that this [interview] is being taped, and that it will be transcribed and given to the Marshall Library.

Bill: Yes.

Jean: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, good. I guess just start with where you were born.

Bill: I was born at Stickney, West Virginia on January the first 1929. It's on West Virginia Route 3 between Whitesville and Beckley, just a little wide spot in the road in Raleigh county. I lived there until I was probably through the third grade in elementary school. Although it was a small community with mostly coal miners and so forth we had electricity but no running water and no gas. I attended Mont Coal elementary school grades one through three and this, of course, was during the depression. The depression was 1929 and I don't know why, maybe it was because of the depression, but my Dad moved us back farther into the country up in the area where he was raised up in Drews Creek, West Virginia. It was about six miles back in a hollow out from Naoma, West Virginia. Of course, his parents lived there and most of his relatives lived there. When we moved back further in the country we didn't have electricity, we didn't have running water, we didn't have gas. We used coal for heating and cooking. At that point, I attended a one room school house from grades four, five, and the first half of grade six. And, of course, we had one teacher for all six grades. The schoolhouse also served as a church on Sundays for the meeting house for worship services. In the elementary school they had six rows of desks and grades one through six was in each row. While it was quite an experience to go to a one room school house I feel like we really got a good education as far as keeping up with what children in other public schools were learning. Because when

Bill (continued): I came to Milton in the middle of the sixth grade we were really a little ahead of the elementary school at Milton.

Interviewer: How many people were in the class?

Bill: In the class, I'd say there was probably, like thirty, maybe, at that particular time in all six grades. I had three different teachers in the three years I was there. One of the teachers was born in the same little community where I was down in Stickney West Virginia; her name was Fannie Talirico. I had two male teachers [Virgil Hoke and John Bradford] and one female teacher. They didn't put up with much foolishness. [quiet laughter] Back in those days they would paddle you when you did something in class you weren't supposed to and I got some paddlings when I was in elementary school. [again quiet laughter] But, anyhow, for some reason or another my Dad came down in the area of Barboursville and was employed at **Case Driveway**, where the Gateway Inn [now called Best Western] is now down at Barboursville. He was looking for housing in this area. My sister and I, my sister was 17 months younger than I am, lived with our first cousin up in Drews Creek, West Virginia while my Dad and Mother were looking for housing. We stayed with them, oh, I don't know, several months and then I moved to Milton about the middle of the sixth grade. And, of course I thought I'd died and gone to heaven when we came to Milton because they had paved roads, and concrete sidewalks you could ride your bike on, close to stores and a movie theater which we didn't have back in the country where I lived. But, I've always liked Milton. I grew up here from the time I was about oh, twelve, thirteen years old and I attended school here. I guess I started in **Milton Junior High School** in 1940. I graduated from **Milton High School** in 1946 and of course, back in those days, all six grades of junior and senior high school were in the same building. You started in the seventh grade and stayed in the same building until you graduated in the twelfth grade.

I played football in high school, I enjoyed sports at that particular time. I met Jean in my senior year, I was a year ahead of her in high school and in 1946 we started dating

Bill (continued): in high school and we're high school sweethearts. Of course we had our ups and downs, broke up and got back together again and this sort of thing.

But, this was during the second World War when I was in high school and there is a certain mentality in that time when all you knew was the war was going on and your attitude was that you were going to graduate from high school and be drafted into the service and go over seas and get your head 'blowed off' or something like that. So it was kind of a mentality that uh, I guess it was called fatalistic, and eventhough I didn't have to, I felt like after I got out of high school I needed to go and get into the service. So, I graduated from high school when I was seventeen years old and worked up in Clarksburg, West Virginia during the summer. Then, in August of 1946 I enlisted in the Army. I had to have my parents signature because I was only seventeen years old when I enlisted. I took my basic training in Fort Dix, New Jersey and I got a five day delay en route between New Jersey and Camp Stoneman, California out in the San Francisco area. I came home and spent a few days and then went over seas in November of 1946. I was in the occupation army in Japan shortly after the second World War and I spent my eighteenth birthday in Japan, I was a long way from home. It was the first time I'd been away from home, but, I was a long way from home when I was eighteen years old. I spent about a year in Japan, in the occupation army, and came back in December of 1947. Of course, Jean and I had been writing eachother all the time we were in service. I'd had matrimony on the mound while I was overseas. So, I came back and her Dad had worked for the railroad. None of my family had ever been 'railroaders' but I got a job with the C&O Railroad in the signal department in 1948, February 1948. This year would have been fifty years from the time I started work. The fact is, this year [1998] was our anniversary. We just celebrated our anniversary on April the ninth of this year, our fiftieth wedding anniversary. I got a job in the signal department, worked about six years out in the field on the Huntington division, around this area, [the Huntington division encompassed several locations] which was all over the coal fields of West Virginia.

Bill (continued): I worked in Logan, I worked in Cabin Creek, I worked in Ashland Kentucky, Milton, Barboursville . . .

Interviewer: And this is with the railroad?

Bill: Railroad, I had to move around a lot back in those days. I goofed off in high school, I wasn't a very good student, but during the time I was working in the field on the Huntington division I took a correspondence course in Railway signaling, from Omaha, Nebraska Railway Signaling School. My grades were sent into the headquarters engineering office in Richmond, Virginia. So in 1953, I think it was, there was a vacancy in the engineering office in Richmond, Virginia and the signal engineer came out into the field where I was working and interviewed me and asked if I'd ever be interested in going into the engineering office. Back at that time they liked to have people in the engineering office who had field experience and, at that time, I had about five years or six years field experience. So, I told him I'd be interested and then the first working day of 1954 I started working in the engineering department of the C&O Railroad in Richmond, Virginia. Jean and I moved from Milton about the middle of January 1954. At that time, we had two children. Steve, our son, was three years old and Sherri, our daughter was a year and a half old. We lived in Richmond from 1954 to the early part of 1963. At that time, the C&O Railroad merged with the Peremarquette Railroad which had lines in Michigan and Canada. The engineering offices were consolidated in Huntington, West Virginia and I was transferred back here with the C&O Railroad in February of 1963. We were consolidated with the ^{Pere Marquette (RR)} Piermarquette engineering office at that time and we've lived here ever since. We bought the lot where our house is now in [hesitates] 1963, I guess it was. At that time, there were lots of rumors about consolidation with the B&O Railroad and moving the engineering office from Huntington to Baltimore. We delayed starting our, building our house for several months because of that and finally we decided, 'well, we needed to go ahead and start building.' So we had this house built and we moved here in October of 1964 and we've been here ever since. So we've always

Bill (continued): enjoyed the Milton area. We moved right back into the same house when we came back here in 1963 that we'd moved out of when we went to Richmond in 1954. Of course, Steve [Bill and Jean's son] was in Junior High School and Sherri [Bill and Jean's daughter] was still in Elementary school when we came back here. But, we've enjoyed living in Milton. Of course, Jean was born and raised here she can tell you something about her history here.

Jean: Do you want to ask him anything else right now?

Interviewer: Oh, I wondered since you went to Milton High School how you felt when they tore it down? [the Grant Building that sat on top of the hill]

Bill: Well, when they tore [it down] and when they consolidated into Cabell Midland?

Interviewer: [nods] Yes.

Bill: It was a little nostalgic. We had our fiftieth class reunion in nineteen . . . ninety six, I guess that's right, . . . yes. Anyhow, we toured the old high school before they torn it down, our class did, and of course, when your in high school you start in there in the seventh grade and it looks so, so large, so humongous, you know. The rooms were large, the high school was large, and then fifty years later you go back and tour the high school and it seems so small [laughter, interviewer makes a small box gesture with hands]. It used to be, when you had the meetings in the auditorium it just seemed like, oh just a mammoth room, and [the same for] our gymnasium. Then, of course, when you go back later on it just seems so small! But, anyhow, it was nostalgic to go back and tour the high school and then to realize that the high school would be torn down and consolidated with our arch rival of Barboursville [said in a kidding fashion]. We were bitter rivals back when I was in high school playing football. Then, of course, Milton and Barboursville were consolidated into Cabell Midland. But, [hesitates] it left kind of a empty feeling because you really don't feel like your a part of Cabell Midland, you know, because I had no connection with that what so ever just in the fact that I went to Milton High School.

Bill (continued): But, it was a little nostalgic to know that it would be torn down and consolidated with Barboursville.

Interviewer: What did your father do?

Bill: My Dad, when I was born up in Stickney West Virginia, at that particular time, he was an automobile mechanic. He had a little garage close to the house and he worked in the coal mines at various times. In the early 1930's, I think about 1934, 1935, he bought an automobile tractor and trailer and started hauling automobiles from Detroit, Michigan down into Virginia and North and South Carolina. So that's one reason, I suppose, that we left the area of Coal River, up in the mining area, because Dad was involved in transporting automobiles from Michigan to North and South Carolina, and Virginia. This is the reason that he came down in this area. He worked for Case Driveway, where the Gateway Inn [now called Best Western] is now. They had a large operation there. I suppose at one time, it looked like they may have had, . . . I'm just guessing . . . , like seventy-five or a hundred automobile transport tractors and trailers there. They had a garage there. At some particular time my Dad stopped hauling automobiles and went to work as a mechanic in the garage there-- working on trucks-- and that is where he worked when I was in high school growing up. I used to go down there when I was in my teens and work with him on Saturday and Sunday and so forth. I'd grease trucks and trailers and that's where I learned to drive was down there driving trucks in and out of the garage: parking 'em, greasing 'em and washing them and so forth. But it was quite an experience to grow up in that particular time, during the second World War and to hang around with my Dad down at Case Driveway when he was a mechanic there. He was a real good mechanic. I don't know how [he learned], I asked him one time where he learned to be a mechanic and he said he saw an ad in a newspaper for an automobile mechanic school out in Nebraska and he left the area up in Raleigh county when he was about sixteen years old . . . I don't know how he got there, probably hitch-hiked . . . but he went to Nebraska and went to automobile mechanic school and then came back to this area. He was always a

Bill (continued): very good mechanic, he had a real good mind. Whatever the specifications were for engines and the tolerances and adjustments and so forth, . . . he'd memorize those. He had automobile mechanic books, . . . auto manuals and whatever the adjustments and tolerances were it seemed like it stuck in his mind, and he had a real good mind for memorizing things and retaining facts. He was an avid reader, he loved to read. I suppose he went through the seventh or eighth grade, back at that time that's all they had, they didn't go through the twelfth grade at that time. But, . . . for a person that grew up in the country like my Dad did he had a real good mind for facts and figures and he read so much that he was pretty well educated . . . for a person that grew up in the coal mining area of West Virginia like we did.

Interviewer: Did he get into the coal mining before [being a mechanic]?

Bill: He worked in the coal mines off and on up there before I was born. Then when I was in the occupation army, over in Japan, for some reason or another, he went back up in that area and worked in the mines while I was in the army. Then, by the time I got out of the service he had moved back to this area in Milton . . .

Jean: No cars were manufactured during the war . . .

Bill: They were manufactured but only for the army . . .

Jean: Well, I mean they weren't hauled . . .

Bill: Well, they did for a few, and back at that time they had a two car law in West Virginia. They would haul four automobiles from Michigan to Barboursville. They had a permit to bring them into West Virginia from Ohio to Barboursville, West Virginia. Then, they had to unload them and they could only haul two automobiles on a trailer through West Virginia during the second World War. Of course, gasoline was rationed, tires were rationed, food was rationed, shoes were rationed, everything was rationed at that particular time. The speed limit was cut back on the highways to 35 miles and hour to conserve fuel during the second World War. But they did have a few automobiles [hauled in], they just didn't change styles. . .

Jean: I thought maybe that was why he [Bill's father] had to go back to the mines . . .

Bill: Well, it may have been, . . . of course they always had a time in the fall when they changed over their . . . , I guess it's their dyes, and their tooling, and everything for automobiles [pause]. . . in Michigan. But, he always had a select time in the fall of the year when they were changing models. But, I don't think they changed models during the second World War very much. I think they used the same automobile [model] from 1941 to 1946, I believe. But, they did have a few automobiles that they hauled through West Virginia at that particular time.

Interviewer: [question directed to Jean] You were born in Milton?

Jean: Yes. My story is more simple than Bill's [she smiles]. I was born in Milton May twenty-ninth 1929 and always lived here until I was in my twenties. I went to Milton Elementary School. We had first, second, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades there and it was a white frame building adjacent to the high school, where the present middle school is. They didn't have enough rooms to have third grades there so we had to go to Milton Central, just for third grade, then we went back to Milton West School. Then, at that point, the high school was right next door, but, it was just the old Grant building on top of the hill and the gymnasium, all that other [the current Milton Middle] was not there. We had all six grades in one school, 7 through 12.

Interviewer: You said Milton Central?

Jean: Yes, that was the elementary school . . .

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Bill: By the way, that's where I went to elementary school when I came to Milton. I finished from the last half of the sixth grade at the Milton Central School.

Jean: We had two elementary schools in town . . .

Bill: Three . . . they had the North school, Central, and West. Jean went to the West school, down there at the [old] high school.

Jean: Let's see, where do we go from here . . . Oh, I did not live on the farm but lived in like the edge of town but I spent a lot of time, as a child, on my grandparent's farm. As I look back I think I couldn't have had a happier childhood. Because everything on the farm- - - my grandfather was a was a railroad section foreman and my Dad and uncles, everybody worked on the railroad - - - but everything that was done on the farm was exciting. If they killed hogs, or they put up hay, or they raised tobacco, . . .

My grandfather's home was owned by he railroad company and it was just like a small community adjacent, close to, the station in Milton. Of course, railroads and trains were my heritage and I still get excited when I hear a steam engine! [Jean laughs] On the farm, the railroad's complex, they had everything!, blacksmith shop, well houses, cellars, smoke houses, chicken houses, barns, [laughter] so it was quite a little world over there.

Interviewer: This was in Milton?

Jean: Yes . . .

Interviewer: Where exactly?

Jean: Where Blenko glass is, across the railroad, all that area over there was owned by the railroad. When my grandfather retired the railroad sold him all that land, except where the house was, they kept that, and he built another house for my grandmother and him on that property. That old railroad house was large and roomy, huge rooms and high ceilings, and at the time I was growing up, a large kitchen would just have a sink and a stove, and a refrigerator and then have a big table in the middle of the room. And, my grandmother always had company. My grandfather would bring people home for lunch and she had a big skillet that just about covered four burners and she would do baked steak or fried chicken, make lots of biscuits. They had a large noon meal and . . . [pause]

Interviewer: She was an avid cooker, huh?

Jean: Yes! [laughter] a homemaker, never knew anything else, but to have noon meal ready. I look back and I wonder how she did all the things she did because there was a large family and it took a day a week to wash clothes, and ironing, and cleaning house, . . .

Interviewer: How many siblings?

Jean: My father had three brothers and two sisters.

I went back to that house a couple of years ago and was invited in and they had built cabinets in the kitchen, like a modern house now, and it was amazing how much smaller that kitchen looked when they got all the cabinets built in because everything had been spotty and furnishings then. Of course, they had fire places and burned coal for heat as well as having gas.

My grandfather was a character and full of tales and it was such fun to be around him. I spent a lot of time there when I was a child [said quietly]. But, everything was exciting.

Bill: By the way, one thing she mentioned about her grandfather buying that farm from the C&O Railroad. Back in the days when they were buying it right of way for the railroad lines a lot of times they couldn't just buy enough for the right of way, they'd have to buy an entire farm. Farmers refused to sell just a portion of their farm and the railroad would then buy an entire farm. It was like 80 acres, I think up there, where Jean's grandfather lived and of course, the company let him use that farm all the time he was a railroad section foreman. Of course, when he retired the Right of way Department of the C&O Railroads sold it [the farm] to him, all of the farm except a small lot and the company house for the section foreman, close to Blenko Glass [in Milton]. The railroad depot sat right there across from Blenko Glass Company and . . .

Jean: Originally the farm went from the river [Mud River] all across behind Blenko where the pond is and [Bill and Jean simultaneously] all the way to the top of the mountain on the other side. So, Blenko Glass bought the portion on their side of the railroad and my grandfather bought all the rest of the farm.

Jean: We used to grow peanuts about where the visitors center was, it was real sandy ground and we had cornfields down in some of the other [land], not right where the pond was but on over.

Jean (continued): During the second World War I did all kinds of things that some girls do not do because all the boys who were of age were gone to the war. I have plowed corn with a horse along with the men and [pause] . . . I was just involved in a lot of things.

Bill: She used to do her grandfather's time sheets and work distribution sheets too. He didn't like paper work. He was a section foreman, but he didn't like paper work. So Jean learned to do all the paperwork for him in connection with the reports he had furnished to the company. Of course, he'd give her a little money over pay day and so forth, that was her spending money at that particular time.

Oh, you asked me about my Dad working in the coal mines . . . he also was a, um, he called it a 'saw logger' and they call it lumberjacks now. He worked in timber, he cut timber, I think when he was about seventeen years old when he was working in timber and somebody slipped a log and from up above him, over a bank, and hit him in the hip and broke his back and his arm and he was laid up in the hospital for sometime but then, of course, when he got over that he went back to 'saw loggin.' During the early part of the second World War he did stay in timber and one of my earliest recollections was he used to haul logs from up in the Stickney area, Coal River, to Charleston and before I started in elementary school he'd let me go back and forth with him. Dad would have the logs chained down on the truck and I was telling my children here awhile back about how scary it was coming up Lenz Creek mountain because he would have the truck down in low gear and it would just be creeping along, you know, and he'd get out on the runnin' board and look over his load to see if his chains were still tight and everything. It used to scare me to death [he laughs] because I hadn't even started in school yet and here I am up in the truck seat and he's out there standing on this running board looking over his load. [laughter]. But, [composes himself] I suppose that's about all he ever did. He worked in timber, he worked in the coal mines, he was a truck driver at one time, and during the second world war when they didn't haul so many automobiles so he also hauled gasoline

Bill (continued): tanker trucks, he was a driver. But then I think most of his career was in mechanics, he was an automobile/truck mechanic--and a real good one.

Jean: My mother's father was also a foreman for the railroad. He was in charge of a gang that actually laid new rail, built new railroad lines up subdivisions and so forth. And my mother, in growing up, lived all over the Big Sandy River in Kentucky and she said when they moved from one location to another that they moved on the train. They'd put their furnishings all on a box car -- there were a lot of local trains then. I remember when I was a child if we wanted to go to Huntington, we'd get on a local train and go to Huntington. I probably didn't ride buses very much until I was in my teens because the railroad was there and we had passes to ride it.

Bill: You could ship things on your pass too, back in those days . . .

Jean: When we lived in Richmond we'd put our children on the train and let them come here to our parents and they were looked after by station masters and so forth. They never had to get off of a train and make a transfer. So, we could send them home on a pass and they would be looked after on the train for us 'till they go to their grandparents. Just like children now can go on a plane somewhere [she laughs] - -but they'd get on and sleep over night.

Bill: They loved to come back over here every summer and spend the summer with their grandparents [at their house] at the end of the covered bridge, well, where the covered bridge used to be over from the [old] high school [the present Milton Middle] ---and they loved that!

Jean: Milton was a great place to live when we grew up. It was safe and everything we needed was here. It wasn't like we needed to go very often to Huntington, or somewhere else. [Milton had] lots of grocery stores, theaters, we had . . . [pause]

Bill: Saturday night was a big night in Milton [Jean agrees and laughs] I'm telling you-- through the week it wasn't much but on Saturday night you couldn't stir the people with a stick, they were so thick down on Main Street. All the farmers would come into town,

Bill (continued): everybody that lived around in Milton would come into town. It would be so crowded you couldn't hardly walk on the sidewalks, you know, . . .

Jean: People just there mingling, having a good time . . .

Bill: That was before television, you know, . . .

Jean: People parked their cars all up and down the streets and sit and watch other people [giggles] . . .

Bill: and talk . . .

Jean: [agrees] and talk to everybody they saw . . .

Bill: That was part of the social life . . .

Jean: I remember the day the war was over in Milton, and everybody [strong emphasis] went to town. They got out the fire engines and some of the service men were home and it was just such a celebration--nothing planned--but everybody was in town because of the good news that had come. At that time, there was a freight depot and a little railroad line that came over into the town and I can remember I was at that freight station on one side of the highway and the stores were on the other side of Main Street, but it was quite a day! [smiles]

Bill: Yes! --- Right where the four lane is through Milton now, there was a freight station, [hesitates] it was where you go down Main Street and you have to turn right because you can't go all the way through [Bill is referring to West Main Street and Smith Street corner] right there where you turn right, just to the left of that where the four lane highway is, was the freight depot.

They had a freight agent there and the box cars and freight cars were delivered from the main line over near Blenko Glass around a spur track all the way over to the freight depot. The fact is, the line went almost down to where the [old] high school is now [present Milton Middle]. You know where the Fighter plane is that they have mounted [in Milton right next to Milton Middle]--that's where the end of the spur track

Bill (continued): was. They would have car loads of material stored on that all the way down to the [old] high school [present Milton Middle].

Jean: I think the original railroad ran down --- through town ----and then later they built a line where it is now . . .

Bill: Yes, through town --- where it is now is called the 'New Grade.' And, although, it doesn't look like much of a grade in there, back when I went to work on the railroad they were still operating steam engines and I guess they operated steam engines---I went to work in 1948 and they started converting over to diesels in, I think, about the middle of the 50's or something like that. But, in the steam days they would pull coal going east and the steam engines would stall, on that grade through Milton here, between Milton and Hurricane, and they would have another- -what they called a pusher engine- -come out of Barboursville and get on the rear end of the coal train and shove it 'till they got over Scary Mountain between Hurricane and St. Albans and once it started down the other side on Scary Mountain the pusher engine would cut off and return to Barboursville. But, for some reason or another, there was enough grade there that the steam engine would stall with like 130 cars of coal on this grade going through Milton. You look at it and it looks almost perfectly flat but, it was enough of a grade going east that the steam engines had difficulty pulling a train load of coal over the hill.

Interviewer: So Milton has changed quite a bit?

Jean: Oh, yes!

Bill: Oh, yes, it sure has.

Jean: I worked the railroad too, for a lot of years, when we lived in Richmond. I went to work for them. Then after Bill was transferred to Huntington my job came too. So, through my children's high school I worked for the railroad too. I stayed with them until they merged with B&O . . .

Bill: [in] 1966 . . .

Jean: Tell her how you felt about getting away from the mines.

Bill: Well, I just feel like it was kind of providential that I got out of that area when I did because if I'd remained in the southern part of West Virginia I'd probably have wound up working in the coal mines just like my relatives did. I had several relatives that worked in the mines up there. I look back on it and the fact that my Dad was involved in hauling automobiles from Detroit, Michigan to some of the southern states was probably the main reason why I got out of that part of the country. While, I'm not ashamed of where I was born and spent part of my childhood, I am very glad that I did not have to go to work in the coal mines. Because, I probably would not have had the health I do right now. I'm nearly seventy years old and I feel like I'm really in good health. You go back in that part of the country and you see people that were my age that stayed in that area and worked in the coal mines and they look like there eighty years old. It's something about the mines that really affects the health of people, I think. But, I was glad that I got out of that part of the country and grew up in Milton, went to high school here, then of course, went to work on the railroad when I was living in Milton. I think it's just fate, just luck, that I didn't wind up in working in the coal mines in southern West Virginia.

Interviewer: Were you around that area when a lot of the strikes and major uproars occurred?

Bill: Not really, I was too young to remember that. Of course, back before I was born or maybe about the time I was born, they used to have some real bad strikes. There was a lot of gunfire and fighting and everything else up in the Logan area but, of course, that's further south going toward Mann and Gilbert and that area. But, up where I was I think they did have the coal strikes and so forth, when they were trying to unionize --- there was a lot of bitterness between companies and unions. But then, during the second World War the coal miners would strike up there --- John L. Lewis was the head of the coal union, coal miner's union --- and they would strike at that particular time. When the coal miner's struck and the railroad wasn't hauling a lot of coal, there would be lay offs on the railroad. I worked for the railroad about a year and they had a strike or something that shut the

Bill (continued): mines down for awhile and I got laid off for about a year when I first started working for the railroad. I put an application in up at Union Carbide in Charleston and about the time I was being called in for an interview to go to work at Carbide the railroad called me back and I went back to work on the railroad. I'm kind of glad I did because I think those people at Carbide were handling chemicals and breathing chemicals that they didn't even know what was going to do to their bodies. I'm sure it had quite an effect on some of their health because of all the chemicals they worked with.

But, I enjoyed my career on the railroad. I worked nearly---about thirty eight years on the railroad. But, I think probably the most fortunate thing that ever happened to me was when I got transferred into the engineering office in Richmond. I got a lot of benefits. I was a non union employee and the company had a retirement plan for technical people and officers of the company that I got involved in and as a result I got a company pension and then when I was sixty years old I was eligible for railroad retirement. So, I really had two pensions, one was a non contributory that the railroad just gave to the people who were non union, officers and technical people of the company, and it was based on years of service and your salary for the last five years you worked, so it really helped out considerably. For that reason, the benefits that I received from the company, as a officer of the company, when I retired I felt like I was really lucky to get into the engineering office when I did. Of course, later on they wouldn't even hire you unless you had a college education --all I had was a high school education and that was a requirement when I went to work . . .

Jean: You went to night school though . . .

Bill: Yes, I went to night school in Richmond Virginia because I'd goofed off in high school. I took some algebra courses in night school in Richmond and learned more there than I did in high school because I was serious about it . . .

Interviewer: You were older . . .

Bill: Yes, your right, more mature.

Interviewer: [directed towards Jean] So, you didn't go to . . . you graduated from high school and then went on to . . . working

Jean: I didn't go to college, no. I worked. I worked for an insurance company agency in Milton for one of the old families until we moved to Richmond and had children during those years. After I went to Richmond, I worked in a church office part time while my children were small. I worked for a coal and oil distribution, they were friends [of ours] and I could have hours arranged that were good with the family and then later I went to work for the railroad too. I worked there in Richmond and came back to Huntington when Bill did and really had a great job for the railroad in Huntington because not everybody who had worked for the railroad in Richmond came to Huntington in clerical positions. So, there were lots of choices then and I really enjoyed it. Of course, as I said the railroad was my heritage on both sides of my family so it was something dear to me. I worked for the bridge and building department in the engineering department.

Interviewer: When you were younger, both of you, I guess, was religion a very big part of your upbringing?

Jean: In Milton, at that time, there were Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and probably some Holiness Church of God, several of those. At that time, there was no Catholic church in the area, anyone who was of another religion went to Huntington. I guess Our Lady of Fatima was the closet [Catholic Church]. I grew up in the Baptist church and probably for that reason never made any change from that. So, when Bill came here, at ten years of age or something, he did not have as strong a religious background as I did. I think he can tell you, he didn't get involved until later . . .

Bill: My mother and father were not involved in the church. I can't remember being in church with either one of them and again I think it was just luck for me to come to Milton because I got involved with the young people in the high school that were active in the church. As a result, I started in Sunday School in church and my typing teacher, in high school, was a teacher in the senior high department in the Baptist church and she would

Bill (continued): always invite people to come to Sunday School and so forth. So, I got involved in her Sunday School class when I was in high school. I did not become a Christian at that time, even though I attended Sunday School off and on at times and sometimes would attend the worship services at church, I was not a Christian. When I was in the service, of course I was like most young people, I experimented with alcohol and I suppose if there had been many drugs at that time, I might have experimented with that too [smiles and laughs quietly] but that was something you just didn't hear of at that time-- no drugs. But, everybody that had a tendency to be on the wild side got involved with alcohol. But, anyhow, after I got out of the service Jean was Christian and her mother was quite active in the Baptist church, Jean was too. Then, I started going to the Baptist church and my conscience bothered because I'd lived the life I had while I was in the service and so forth, so I was converted. I became a Christian shortly before I was nineteen years old. I was baptized in the old Milton Baptist Church there, on my nineteenth birthday on January 1, 1948, I was baptized on my birthday. And of course, Jean and I were always active in church here and brought our children up in the church and when we went to Richmond we got involved in church over there immediately. I taught Sunday School for years. I started teaching the junior age group from nine through twelve when I was in Richmond, Virginia. I taught intermediate age group and senior high school age group and even taught an adult class over there [in Richmond] for a short time before we came back to West Virginia. Here at Milton, I taught a young adult class for, . . . well I worked with the senior high school class when my children were growing up and then later on I got involved in the young adult class and I taught it for fifteen years. So, we've always been very active in church . . .

Jean: We're still involved with young adults . . .

Bill: Yes

Jean: . . . at the Baptist Church here.

Interviewer: Didn't you used to have a piano in here?

Bill: Yes

Jean: Yes

Interviewer: Do either one of you play piano?

Bill: [Bill and Jean simultaneously] Neither of us played piano but our children both had piano lessons beginning in Richmond, Virginia. I picked up the guitar after we moved to Milton [omitted word] back in 1964 or 1965. Cliff [omitted last name], across the street here, got me interested in playing the guitar. So, I bought a guitar and a chord book and learned to play the guitar and Cliff and Harold [omitted last name] and I started playing music together every Tuesday night, back at that time, and we've been doing it for over thirty years. So, I enjoy playing the guitar. I've learned to play that fairly well.

Jean: Talk about your family musical background.

Bill: Yes, my mother's people were musically inclined. I have about three aunts on my mother's side that learned to play the piano by ear. They were very, very talented. One of my aunts, my mother's sister, lives in Beckley now and she's seventy six or seventy seven and she still plays the piano in church and plays the organ and so forth. Occasionally, I'll take my guitar up there and we'll have a jam session [smiles], I'll play music with my aunt. She'll have some of her friends come in, their in their seventies and eighties, and they'll bring their musical instruments and we all just have a great time playing music together up there, you know. My mother's side of the family the people were musical, played music by ear. I don't recall anybody on my Dad's side of the family being involved with music.

Interviewer: Was there any banjo playing?

Bill: Banjo players, not in my family I don't think, but Cliff, across the street, plays banjo and he played with us for years. We had a banjo, two guitars and now Cliff doesn't play with us anymore but, there's a fellow that worked for the telephone company, lives in Hurricane, and plays the keyboard. So, we have a keyboard and two guitars. We just play for our own enjoyment and sometimes we'll play for nursing homes. We've played for the Woodlands Retirement Center down in Huntington, it's not really a nursing home but a

Bill (continued): retirement center, and we play music for them occasionally. We'll play for Morris Memorial Nursing Home and down in the West end of Huntington there is a nursing home that we play for down there. But, that's about all we do outside of just playing for our own enjoyment, you know, is play for nursing homes and so forth . . .

End of Side 1, Begin Side 2

Interviewer: Bill, what do you feel you are the most proud of about West Virginia?

Bill: Well, I'm proud of the beauty of the state and I'm proud of the people of West Virginia. I think there is a pride in the people of West Virginia that runs very deep and the fact is, I think if you found out how many men that were in service and how many people that probably died in the first and second World War there would be quite a number from West Virginia as compared to other states. I think there is a loyalty here and a patriotism that I'm proud of and of course, I think the beauty of the state is undeniable. I've been many, many places and I don't know of any place that has any more beautiful scenery than the state of West Virginia. We have some beautiful state parks and I think the state has been promoting tourism and most of the people that I hear travel through West Virginia think it's a beautiful state. We've stayed at some of the state parks and they have very nice facilities and I think it's something that should be promoted. I think it's a great place to live. Of course, through the years people have kidded us in West Virginia about being hillbillies and have one leg shorter than the other because we're walking around on the side of a mountain all the time and you hear this from other states and sometimes there is some negative comments about West Virginia. I found in a lot of places that they still haven't separated West Virginia from Virginia. They ask you where your from and you tell them West Virginia and they say 'Oh, we know some people from Richmond' and they haven't separated Virginia and West Virginia yet. But, I think it's a beautiful state and I'm very proud of it.

Bill (continued): Some of the things I'm not so proud of is the fact that the people in some areas don't really take pride in their property. There seems to be a mind set where there is a lot of trash that is dumped along the highways and a lot of junk that is dumped where it shouldn't be and this is an eye sore and I'm not proud of that. I wish people would take more pride in the state and in the highway system and not litter the highway so much or dump their old trash along the highways and so forth. And, of course, in some parts of the state you can see old automobiles with their wheels off up on cinder blocks, this sort of thing is an eyesore. By and large I think it's a beautiful state.

Interviewer: What do you feel least proud of?

Jean: Least proud of? . . . I would think the things people do to take away from the attractiveness of the state. I think many of us are really proud and try to keep things nice and I think that bothers me more than anything---the litter along the highways and old furniture people might throw out. I hope we're making a little bit of difference. I think our state has grown economically and financially, I think our state is in better financial condition for the last few administrations. I think we're turning around some.

Interviewer: What attributes of this area, the crafts, the music, what is most unique to you?

Jean: Well, our glass manufacturing is something to be proud of. I'm always proud to go other places and see Blenko Glass and I have been involved with Milton Garden Club's arts and crafts fair for years and there are a lot of artists. We have a lot of people in pottery making, I know some of those personally. I think some of them are great artisans.

Interviewer: Well, overall the scenery of West Virginia . . .

Bill: Yes!

Jean: Yes, we have just been out of the state to the sea shore and I think your impressed all over again when you drive through, coming up 77. It's just incomparable . . .

Interviewer: after you've been away for a while . . .

Jean: Yes! yes! I appreciate just coming down the road on a spring day, down Route 60 even. It's unique--the state is.

Interviewer: Have you heard a lot of positive remarks about the state from people outside the state - - - or have they been more negative?

Jean: Not really either way. I don't know who I've talked with that's visited here . . .
[thinking]

Bill: Most of the people I think that travel through West Virginia all have fine comments about the beauty of the state, the scenery and so forth . . .

Jean: I did hear some young people last week, in North Carolina, talking about the white water rafting here and how much they enjoyed that and how beautiful the rivers were.
And they are!

Interviewer: Okay, well, I'd like to thank both of you for doing the interview . . .

Bill: Your welcome, I'm glad we could do it.

Interviewer: I appreciate it!

End of Interview